

NHL POSITION PAPER

THIS STATEMENT SHOULD BE USED TO GUIDE COMMENTS ON NHL RULES AND POLICY GOVERNING UNACCEPTABLE ACTS OF AGGRESSION BY NHL PLAYERS AGAINST THEIR FELLOW PLAYERS.

STATEMENT

The NHL Board of Governors has, over a period of time, enacted measures to punish players for unacceptable acts of aggression on the ice. Tough sanctions have evolved to penalize offenders who threaten or cause injury to fellow players.

In this respect, the NHL has long been alert to the fact that the hockey stick can become a weapon when used in an attempt to injure. A regimen of suspensions without pay and game misconducts are in place to punish the intentional use of the stick as a threat or instrument of bodily harm to NHL players. In fact, legislation was enacted last year penalizing even the accidental injury of an opponent by the stick.

These sanctions are the toughest in any professional sport and are applied by the NHL in its vigilant pursuit to try to prevent intentional injuries to players by use of the stick.

As a result of these efforts, over the past 12-year period, covering 12,000 games, only 15 players were forced to miss a game through injury caused by attempts to injure or intentional injury. This represents less than one-tenth of one percent of the total NHL man-games lost to injury in that period.

Fighting is another target of NHL legislation.

Under the rules, a person who fights is taken out of the play. He is not -- in the initial instance -- taken out of the game. Repeat behavior inevitably leads to his removal from the game.

It has been the League's position that the nature of hockey -- intensive, emotional, provocative and frustrating for players at various moments in the game -- produces an atmosphere that can lead to player aggression.

If this aggression must be released, which it sometimes must, it is preferable for this to happen one-on-one, the gloves off, and without the stick being used in venting this aggression. Injuries to players by reason of deliberate and unacceptable aggressive acts against one another have thus been kept to a minimum.

Under League rules, however, multiple player fights have been the target of stiffened sanctions. These have had a telling effect, virtually eliminating bench clearing brawls. None have occurred in three years.

As part of this legislative regimen to combat these various forms of unacceptable aggression, the NHL has also toughened the rules of supplementary discipline. The result: remedies stronger even than those available by way of the public judicial system for offenses of a like kind.

In all of this, the NHL's priority is to seek to prevent player injuries caused by rule violations.